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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/17/2019
TAGS: PGOV, EPET, ENRG, SA
SUBJECT: ARAMCO SKEPTICAL OF CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION
INITIATIVE

REF: DE RHEBAAA #2397 1281145

CLASSIFIED BY: Joseph Kenny, Consul General, EXEC, DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1. KEY POINTS:

-- (S/NF) Saudi Aramco's Executive Management is skeptical of the presence of Ministry of Interior (MOI) critical infrastructure protection (CIP) forces near their oil and gas facilities.

-- (S/NF) Aramco is currently undergoing a major upgrade to their perimeter surveillance system, in what may be an attempt to mitigate MOI encroachment on Aramco facilities.

-- (S/NF) Several key Aramco contacts confirm that the recent resignation of the head of Aramco security was unrelated to the CIP initiative.

2. COMMENT:

-- (S/NF) Saudi Aramco harbors deep reservations about MOI's

growing involvement in the protection of its facilities, which Aramco deems unnecessary and ill-suited. Saudi Aramco is losing ground in this domestic wrangling over CIP, but is directing its rancor at the MOI, not the USG.

ARAMCO SKEPTICAL OF MOI-CIP INITIATIVE

3. (S/NF) Aramco's Executive Management team including the CEO, Khalid al-Falih, is hesitant to permit MOI-CIP forces into their oil and gas facilities. This fact was made abundantly clear in a meeting that former Ambassador Fraker, the Consul General and PolOff had with al-Falih several months ago. Aside from the visibly uncomfortable gestures and eye contact he made with his Senior VP for Industrial Relations when CIP was raised, al-Falih noted that Aramco was very skeptical of the net benefit of having Saudi soldiers around highly combustible and very sensitive industrial facilities. He noted that after the terrorist attack on Abqaiq in 2005, Saudi soldiers deployed to protect the infrastructure were smoking cigarettes, driving their vehicles perilously close to equipment, and interfering in the operation of the oil facilities.

4. (S/NF) Al-Falih emphasized that Saudi Aramco is not happy about MOI (irrespective of USG involvement) interfering with their facilities and they believe that they are more than capable of protecting their own assets without outside help. It appears that Aramco has accepted the fact that MOI will inevitably be encroaching on their turf and are now in the process of mitigating this effect as much as possible. As testament to this observation, they are in the final stages of signing a contract for a \$1 billion perimeter surveillance system for all of their facilities across the kingdom. Northrop Grumman has been awarded the contract (close hold), though Aramco has not yet officially made the announcement. In addition, according to our sources in Aramco Affairs, the new Executive Director of Safety and Industrial Security, Mohammed al-Zahrani, was selected because of his knowledge of operations and facilities, not his security credentials. His most recent position was manager of the critical office of Oil Supply, Planning and Scheduling (OSPAS).

5. (S/NF) According to a cable from the Department of Energy (ref A), Samir Raslan, General Manager for Industrial Security at Aramco, was forced to resign by Aramco management. However, a number of post contacts at Aramco insist that Samir quit and was not fired or forced to resign. In fact, before submitting his resignation Raslan made it clear to his subordinates and to post that if he did not receive a promotion to Executive Director of Safety and Industrial Security he would move on from Aramco. When the position was given to al-Zahrani, he submitted his resignation.

KENNY

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